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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1246  
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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1859  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8879  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7118  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5095  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3252  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5052  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1331  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0589  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4162  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9458  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6759  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1258  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3690  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000823

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE QUESTION CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT OF  
EUROPEANS AS CO-CHAIRS

REF: SECSTATE 85620

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: At an August 19 bilateral meeting, Japanese Ambassador Takahashi told Charge that Japan questioned the effectiveness of the Europeans as participants in the Co-Chairs mechanism, effectively proposing that the U.S., India, and Japan would serve as the most influential interlocutors (quote main partners unquote) with the GSL. While Takahashi said Japan was "very severe" with the GSL behind closed doors on such issues as the treatment of IDPs, Japan also believed taking a critical approach publicly was not fruitful and that conditionality on aid was counter-productive. Charge said while consideration had been given to a separate, larger Friends of Sri Lanka group, we did not believe a decision had been made by the U.S. on restructuring the Co-Chairs to make the group smaller. Post believes creation of a larger Friends group -- which could include Japan, India, the U.S., as well as Canada, Australia, the U.K., and European partners -- could be productive. In practice, post initiated such a consultative process in developing a post-conflict assistance strategy in the East in 2007-08. The difficult question is whether to include China in a larger contact group. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Kunio Takahashi invited Charge, acting DCM, Political Chief, and DATT to a bilateral lunch with counterparts at the Japanese Embassy on August 19. During the wide-ranging discussion, Takahashi touched on the current political situation in Sri Lanka and the conditions of the IDPs. In contrast to recent talk in diplomatic circles in Colombo that the UN might consider withholding its aid if the GSL did not make progress on improving IDP camp conditions and releasing IDPs, Takahashi noted that Japan opposed any conditionality. He also reiterated the statement recently made by Japanese Special Envoy to Sri Lanka Akashi to A/S Blake that Japan wanted to delay a proposed meeting on Sri Lanka in Japan until after

Japanese parliamentary elections (reftel). It quickly became evident, however, that the primary purpose of the meeting was to float the idea of restructuring the Co-Chairs to eliminate the EU and Norway.

¶3. (C) Takahashi -- who is a China specialist -- referred repeatedly to Japanese concerns about the growing influence of the Chinese, both politically and commercially, in Sri Lanka. He said Japan believed the Europeans, "very direct" approach to the Sri Lankans on humanitarian and human rights issues was not productive, was alienating the Sri Lankans, and risked pushing them into the arms of China, Iran, and Burma. Japan, he claimed, was "very severe" with the Sri Lankans behind closed doors, arguing strongly for improvements in the conditions of the camps and the need for political reform and decentralization. But overall, the Sri Lankans were more receptive to carrots than sticks. To continue down the path of harshly criticizing the Government in public, as the Europeans did, risked alienating them further. Thus, it was in the interest of the U.S. and Japan to think about "restructuring" the Co-Chairs to accommodate the changed conditions in post-war Sri Lanka. Charge asked Takahashi to repeat his proposal to assure clarity, which he did.

¶4. (C) Charge reminded Takahashi that Japanese Special Envoy for Sri Lanka Akashi on his last visit just a few months ago insisted that the "Co-Chairs should remain the Co-Chairs." Charge also spoke about his own efforts in April to counter GSL unilateral attempts to eliminate the Europeans from the

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Co-Chairs format. He said he was unable at this point to address Takahashi's proposal directly without Washington guidance.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) It was clear from this meeting that the Japanese would like to see the Europeans eased out of the Co-Chairs and that they have great concern that the Europeans' more public approach to criticizing the Sri Lankans risked pushing the GSL toward China. This could be taken as a back-handed criticism of the U.S. approach as well. While post agrees that tough messages can be delivered effectively to the Government privately, we also believe that public statements on humanitarian concerns, the importance of the early return of IDPs, and the need for concrete actions to address the grievances of minority communities are essential.

¶6. (C) Post believes there is an argument for dropping of the Co-Chairs mechanism if it were replaced by a larger Friends of Sri Lanka contact group. Changed realities with the end of the war call for a new approach that involves a larger group of countries that have expressed interest in Sri Lanka.

Such a Friends group could include the U.S., Japan, India, Canada, the UK, Australia, the EU, Norway, and others. (We believe Co-Chair members Norway and the EU should be retained in such a group.) In practice, the Embassy began to move in this direction in 2007-08 when we consulted more widely in Colombo on a post-conflict strategy for the East and reconstruction efforts there. This process of wider donor coordination generally worked well. We have done the same this year in addressing humanitarian concerns created by the large outflow of IDPs from the North and their confinement in camps and in discussing with other donors the provision of assistance for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants. The tough question would be whether to invite China, which clearly plays a significant role in Sri Lanka but whose political message to the GSL is often at variance with ours and whose inclusion may be resisted by Japan and India.

MOORE